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FM AMEMBASSY NOUAKCHOTT
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8760
INFO RUEHBP/AMEMBASSY BAMAKO 0318
RUEHNM/AMEMBASSY NIAMEY 3300

C O N F I D E N T I A L NOUAKCHOTT 000578

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DEPARTMENT PLEASE PASS PEACE CORPS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/14/2014
TAGS: [PREL](#) [ASEC](#) [AMGT](#) [MR](#)
SUBJECT: RESUMPTION OF PEACE CORPS OPERATIONS IN MAURITANIA

REF: NOUAKCHOTT 575

Classified By: CDA Dennis Hankins for reasons 1.4 (b and d)

11. (C) Summary: Mission recommends the return of Peace Corps volunteers in areas of lesser terrorist risk defined as locations west of the Mission-designated "frontier zone." Peace Corps volunteers in Nouakchott, if any, would have to be placed in housing that meets USG standards for direct hires. End Summary

12. (C) A new Security Strategy Based on AQIM Intent: Reftel outlined the Mission's "Layered Security Strategy" stemming from the September 2-3 interagency conference held in Nouakchott to discuss counter-terrorism and counter-extremism engagement with the newly elected Government of the Islamic Republic of Mauritania (GIRM). The strategy draws from an understanding of AQIM tactics in Mauritania that target outlying towns and cities that are vulnerable to cross-desert hit-and-run attacks (defined as the "frontier zone" running from Zouerate in the north to Nema in the southeast) and Nouakchott (as the political capital and home to a quarter or more of all Mauritanians) for higher-profile attacks that may include VBIEDs, PBIEDs, and assassination attempts. The areas west of the frontier zone and outside of Nouakchott are deemed less at risk since it is more difficult to escape after a hit-and-run attack (because the attackers need to by-pass multiple security check points), because they offer fewer high-value political targets, and, because of their smaller populations, it is difficult to conduct pre-attack surveillance. The Mission response is: (a) to bolster early-warning through our on-going and effective security cooperation as well as provision as requested of airborne ISR and training and equipping of the Mauritanian border patrol and long-range reconnaissance units; (b) providing ongoing training and equipment to the Mauritanian elite military counter-terrorism units based in the "frontier zone;" and, (c) building military command-and-control as well as police and justice sector capacity in Nouakchott.

13. (C) Evaluating PCV Safety: On August 8, Peace Corps headquarters in conjunction with the Department decided to suspend its Mauritanian operations and either re-assign or repatriate all of its volunteers in country. In its August 12 press release, Peace Corps noted, "Although it is the Agency's position that the Volunteers are relatively safe in their communities and villages, it is potentially dangerous for them to safely travel in the country." The combined Peace Corp / Diplomatic Security assessment team also noted the good security for the PCVs during their August 8 out brief with the Ambassador. They noted a remarkably high level of awareness and concern about the PCVs from community leaders. They also noted the security effectiveness of check points (often multiple) at roads leading into towns. The August 12 statement also noted, "The Peace Corps will continue to assess the situation and determine when the

security conditions on the ground permit the safe return of Volunteers."

¶4. (C) A Safe Region to Operate: Threat reporting continues to show a desire and capability for AQIM to conduct terrorist operations in Mauritania. Consistent with Para. 1, the threat reporting focuses on the "frontier zone" and Nouakchott. It is unlikely the AQIM threat will diminish in the foreseeable future. The nature of the threat reporting, however, indicates that there are appreciably safer parts of the country where renewed Peace Corps operations would be possible. Post proposes that Peace Corps operations be renewed in the provinces of Dakhlet Nouadhibou, Inchiri, Brakna, Assaba, Gorgol, and Guidimaka. Peace Corps operations would not take place in the provinces of Zemmour, Adrar, Tagant, Hodh-el-Gharbi, and Hodh-el-Chargi (note: there were no previous operations in Zemmour and Hodh-el-Chargi provinces).

¶5. (C) Status of Nouakchott PCVs: There have never been a large number of PCVs assigned to the capital of Nouakchott. Those who have worked here have been "third years" who demonstrated responsibility during their previous three years. The volunteers have made useful contributions to central Mauritanian training facilities based in Nouakchott. Post would like to continue with these important postings but only if we could provide a level of security on a par with USG employees based here. That would include housing with secure doors, an alarm, and guard service. Ideally, Nouakchott PCVs would have vehicles so they would not need public transit or taxis.

¶6. (C) Ambassador,s Consultations: Ambassador Boulware will be in Washington October 3 to 16 and would welcome the opportunity to discuss renewed Peace Corps operations during his consultations.
HANKINS